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IN MEMORY OF JAMES
GARFIELD, PRESIDENT OF
UNITED STATES.

A SERMON...

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IN MEMORY OF
JAMES A. GARFIELD,

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

SOUTH CHURCH, IPSWICH, MASS.,

SEPTEMBER 25, 1881.

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. T. FRANK WATERS.

SALEM:
OBSERVER STEAM PRINTING ROOMS,
1881.

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Gift
Emanuel Hertz
May 16, 1930

DEAR SIR :

Your discourse in memory of our late lamented President, JAMES A. GARFIELD, deserves a recognition beyond the passing hour. Its inherent merit, and the occasion and the man it commemorates, entitle it to preservation, and therefore, we, for ourselves and numerous other hearers, ask it for publication.

Yours with esteem,

ABRAHAM LORD,
JOHN J. GOULD.
EDWARD P. KIMBALL,
EVERETT K. BROWN,
CHARLES PALMER,
JOSEPH I. HORTON,
ARTHUR W. DOW.

REV. T. FRANK WATERS.

IPSWICH, October 29, 1881.

IPSWICH, Nov. 1st, 1881.

To Abraham Lord, John J. Gould, and others.

DEAR SIRS :

It gives me pleasure to comply with your request, and I will place it in your hands at once.

At the same time I am fully aware that much of the interest the discourse aroused, was due to the place and the occasion of its delivery, and that when separated from those accessories, and read from the printed page, it may give you far less pleasure.

Fraternally yours,

T. FRANK WATERS.

SERMON.

All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous ; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness.—*Heb*: 12:11.

This Sabbath day is a day of peculiar solemnity. For weeks and months our minds have centered on that sick room where our honored chief magistrate lay in pain and sore weakness :—our hearts have cried out to God to raise the sufferer to health and strength. We have come to the sanctuary feeling that the one petition that must be uttered was for this end, we have gone from the sanctuary anxious lest tidings should have come that he was already beyond the reach of prayer and sympathy.

To-day no prayer is offered for that beloved ruler, no hopes of recovery beat within our hearts. Our fears are all realized. The poor, pain-racked body lies in more than royal state, in a distant city, whither it has been borne, attended by the honors that have been lavished by a stricken and sorrowful people. The struggle is over and death has gained the victory. The wondrous physical strength, the heroic fortitude and patience of the sufferer, the skill of the most eminent physicians, the sympathy and prayer of the nations of the earth have at last been overcome, and he sleeps the placid sleep of death.

This people knows the awful truth of the inspired word ; “ this chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous.”

There is a sense of personal affliction that oppresses the

hearts of all. It is not merely a great official, it is one whom we have reckoned among the number of our friends, almost of our family circle, whom death has snatched away.

Strong ties of sympathy bind the hearts of this nation to the widow, who suffers in this the final stroke of months of bitterest trial and suspense, to the fatherless children, bereft of so noble a parent, to the aged mother, bowing under the crushing sorrow that treads so closely upon the rapture, caused by the sight of the high honor that the son of her love had won.

We think of the misfortune that has befallen the nation. His voice has been so wise to counsel, his hand has been so strong to guide through the years past, that we hoped under his leadership to overcome existing troubles and push on to a place among the nations that had never before been gained by any people. We thought we saw the promise of a strong and brilliant and pure administration of government, and well may we toll the bells of our churches and display the habiliments of sorrow, seeing that the same grave that receives his form, holds the nation's hope and the object of the nation's love. Unspoken fears for the future disturb our hearts, for we fear what may be the outcome of an administration which is regarded with such peculiar lack of confidence, and may be guided by such inauspicious influences.

If ever grief is becoming, it is in such an extremity. If a nation should ever give way to sorrow now is the occasion.

But words of mine, or of any man, are not needed to rouse such emotion as this. No lengthy eulogy, no high-colored and harrowing portrayal of the suffering and death are required.

There is need rather of reminding you of the latter words of the text, that although no chastening seemeth for the present to be joyous, but grievous "yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that are exercised thereby." The

grief that we feel may tend to become bitterness, the regard we had for the dead ruler may tend to make us forget the duty due the new ; the righteous indignation at the foul deed of the assassin may have developed into a blood-thirsty demand for revenge. It is not wise or right that we should be thus carried away by the flow of our feelings. It is not fitting that we should conduct ourselves in any way that will afterwards seem weak and blameworthy. It is not seemly that we should forget that an all-merciful God has spoken the word that has made us sorrowful. It is not all dark, some bright spots already relieve the gloom, and we may hope for a growing brightness as the future unfolds itself. Let us dwell upon them a little that we may gain some good cheer in the midst of the nation's grief.

I. We cannot ask a nobler fame for ourselves or for any one we love, than posterity will certainly bestow upon the name of our illustrious dead President. Fame may be a bauble, but it is a bauble that is counted very precious, nevertheless. There is a proud satisfaction in realizing that your deeds and words are not only regarded by the hosts of the living, but will also be regarded by generation after generation long after your form has crumbled back to dust, and that the destiny of the race is to be affected in greater or less degree through the influence you wield. Such power makes its possessor more than a king in honor. It is truly a great matter to be thus a councillor in the assemblies of State, a leader in the thick of the battle, a teacher in the schools, a familiar and honored name in the homes of the people for ages.

But fame once achieved is not a certainty. Sometimes life lasts too long. The early brilliancy does not attain the full meridian splendor of which it gave promise. The great deeds of the prime of life are overshadowed by the foolish and weak efforts of old age. Qualities, the very opposite of

those which gain glory may develop with after years, and turn the glory into shame. So far as the getting of fame is concerned, it is surer for a career to be completed at its zenith than after it has waned to its setting. Keats died at 26, a mere youth, but the world will always think of him as a poet of the finest genius, because of the bright promise that was cut short by his early death. Had he lived four score he might have uttered such weak babblings as have marked the decline of many a master-mind before and since his day.

The philosopher Schelling died late—at seventy-nine, but at thirty-five he had reached his highest, and lived to be out-grown, and comparatively forgotten.

When death comes suddenly, in the prime of a man's power, there is a great expectation of still greater attainments that is cut short. But there is an unconscious adding of what he was expected to attain, to what he has already accomplished in our estimate of his power, and particularly when there is anything specially sad or touching in the manner of the death; our sympathetic admiration not only adds imaginary future deeds, but clothes his past career with brightest honor.

Had Mr. Garfield lived till to-day in full health and strength, and with the same promise of life that we all cherish, we know well that in our estimate of his character we might find flaws, and that in the case of many of his official acts, we might not only question the wisdom of his course, but perchance some suspicion of his motive might creep upon us. We know full well that had he lived he might have disappointed his friends, his country, and the world by unsuspected weakness and newly developed faults, for James A. Garfield was only a man. No single trait of character was other than human. No angelic patience or God-like purity was his. As a man he was not free from human fault, he was not above the reach of human frailty.

But the moment he fell beneath the assassin's hand, all thought of any misjudgment or error, or fault in the past, was banished ; all possibility of such in the future was forgotten. A deep and generous sympathy moved every heart ; of a sudden, his brilliant powers, his unquestioned fidelity to duty, his unshrinking veracity, his skill in the intricacies of state craft, his devotion to a widowed mother, and his own family circle, his Christian heroism in the face of death, these engaged the notice of all, and as the long anxious weeks have worn away, and no murmur has escaped the sufferer's lips, no harsh, petulant complaint, but the same steadfast patience has ever been manifest ; and even in the wanderings of his fevered brain his thoughts have been so pure, and lofty, and large, the hearts of the people have been drawn not only to admire him, but to love—to love him as the generation now living has never loved any man, and as it is not likely to love again. And in his death that admiration and love have become at once elevated into the homage and reverence that is the glory of the martyr, for in the eyes of this nation our dead Ruler is a martyr for his country's good. Martyrdom always works wonders. Cranmer was a weak, ambitious time-serving, cruel ecclesiastic, not devoid of excellencies, but of great and conspicuous faults ; but having in his old age, when calamity had overtaken him, manifested hearty contrition, and having suffered death at the stake, we wonder when we find that the same fire which destroyed his life, purged away the dross of his fair fame as well, and the world honors him to-day despite his faults. Much more then, in the case of a life so fair and lovable as this life has ever been, does martyrdom put its seal upon it, and fix its fame as preeminently good and sweet and manly, for all coming time.

No, I say, this event is not all dark, nor inexplicable. Follow him from his humble home, see him at fourteen at work at a carpenter's bench ; at sixteen a mule-driver on

the tow-path of a canal; at eighteen working his way through the Chester seminary; at twenty-one teaching in one of Ohio's common schools, and at the same time pushing forward his own studies so successfully that at twenty-three we find him entering Williams college in the sophomore year; at twenty-six graduating with the first honors of his class; at twenty-seven a tutor in Hiram college; at twenty-eight President of the same; at twenty-nine a member of the Ohio Senate, the youngest member of the body; at thirty-one a colonel in the volunteer army, and the same year in command of a brigade, and engaged in conspicuous and successful operations against the enemy; at thirty-two promoted to the rank of Major-General for gallantry in the field; at thirty-three in Congress; at forty-eight having been for fifteen years continuously re-elected, elected to the Senate; at forty-nine elected President of the U. S.; and in his fiftieth year, after five months in the Presidential office, shot by an assassin.

If we end thus, it reads strangely; it seems a strangely tragic and unfortunate end for such a career: but the record does not end there. To be complete, let there be written after all this, for eleven weeks the object of the most solicitous and anxious interest to two continents; the object of continuous and universal prayer to two great nations; the absorbing object of attention, which caused all political animosities to be forgotten, and all strife of factions to cease; the peer and equal of kings and queens and emperors, and all the world's great ones; at his death, occasioning sorrow in every heart which ever knew his worth, filling the whole broad area of his own land with deepest grief, and rousing a re-echoing knell upon the church bells in distant Britain; borne to his burial amid the most solemn expressions of a nation's grief.

From the humble frontier cabin, up through all the stages of political honor, up to the highest place a man can gain in

this land, up to the place in the Heaven above, in a way almost as glorious as the whirlwind and horses and chariots of fire, in which Elijah went up on High. Is it not a glorious end after all? Despite the sorrow, the disappointment, the prospect of greater things in coming time, is it not glorious to leave a record so splendid, a fame so sure. If we wish our hero fame,—a bright and glorious fame,—a name that will be associated with the purest and greatest names of our land, our wish is gratified most signally.

II. Our country, though chastened, is blessed. There is always a call to serious thoughtfulness in every death. Pre-eminently in the case of a death like this, a nation is moved. This nation has been made to realize, by this sore calamity, let us hope, the danger that lies in many of the existing methods, popular in political circles. Orators have spoken their most eloquent and logical appeals, graceful writers have penned their assaults upon the evils of our systems, the best sentiment of the land has been fully in sympathy with any efforts toward securing a reform; still the spoils system, the personal favor system, the bribery system, the intimidation system, have each held sway. The whole machinery of government has been regarded as a convenient gift by those in office rewarding political services by their henchmen. It has made the civil service largely ornamental and useless, and far more expensive than is requisite. It has compelled our Congressmen to give seven-eighths of their time to merely private concerns. It has overwhelmed the chief executive with a load too great for the strongest to carry. Ultimately, this system tends to subvert all true democratic government, to elevate the worst men to the highest place, and to imperil the safety of the nation.

Can the people of this land fail to trace out the connection between the irreparable loss sustained in the death of their President, and these crying evils? Not that the unhappy spectacle of partisan strife that preceded the

sadder spectacle of the assassination is to be connected with the latter as its guilty cause, but will not the people see in the passions, the debates, the hot strife of the former the legitimate excitement of the insane purpose, which resulted in the President's death? If this American people is aware of what its own interest demands shall it not be that, awakened from its indifference by this shock, it will utter its voice in thunder tones, and demand a purer and better system? Will not this people, that would now give its millions of gold and silver to rear up any memorial that might testify its regard for the lamented dead, see the fittest and most significant memorial in the instant resolution to complete the good work that our President began so well, and to carry that same spirit into the administration of all its affairs? If this should result, it might be worth the precious sacrifice that has been made. But even if a sentiment is impressed on the nation that will lead ultimately to this, the blessing is great.

It is a blessing to the nation that we have all been impressed by this career, by the practicability of preserving a Christian manhood in the foul pool of political corruption. There is need of good men, pure men, men of high Christian principle, in office, from the lowest to the highest grade. Unless such are willing to do their part, the bad will carry all before them. It is worth much, then, that we see a good man in the political arena, and successful in his endeavors.

It is a blessing that the rising generation has a fresh stimulus to self-endeavor, to overcome all the obstacles that poverty interposes in the way of ambition, to aspire to as honorable a place as the nation can bestow. The American ideal of manhood has been filled so well by him that the youth of this and coming generations will find great profit in studying it.

Finally, we learn a good lesson for ourselves. Many

lessons, indeed, are taught us ; but I will speak only of one. That is, the attractiveness, the genuine worth, of simple, homely goodness.

It was not the high official position merely, nor was it the tragic occasion of his suffering, that made his illness a time of such suspense to us all. There was something deeper than that, which took strongest hold upon us. It was the remembrance of that simple and natural filial affection which caused a place of honor to be reserved amid all the pageantry and dignity of the Inaugural ceremonies, for his venerable mother, and prompted that affectionate embrace of mother and wife in the face of the assembled thousands. It was the revelation of the simple, commonplace home-life, in which the honor due a parent and the love due a family had such free exercise. It was the thought of that sturdy Christian character which clung to a small and obscure sect through all the years of prosperity ; and was faithful to its calls while occupying the highest place. "He was a good man," as his old mother has often said. He was a good man, is the response of the nation, and we loved him for his goodness, and we were grieved when he was called to suffer.

The glitter of genius, the imposing display of strength, the attractiveness of statesman-skill, have power to engage our attention : but the fascination of simple, unaffected goodness, of kindness of heart, broad sympathies, deep affections, is the strong clasp that bound the hearts of the nation to their President. The grandeur of the man far surpassed the accidents of place and circumstance. To us, the lesson of his life remains as a great and strong incentive to virtue. May we see that true greatness lies not in wealth, not in high place, not in tricks and stratagems, not in stern and hateful worship of self and Mammon ; but in a pure and simple and hearty devotion to God and the right. May we realize that the honor men pay to outward

greatness is as nothing compared with the homage they render to simple virtue. And may we each, in our own lives, see and see clearly, that though in talent and opportunity he surpassed any one of us as the sun surpasses the faint glimmer of a glow-worm, that in a little sphere that surrounds us, we, by living as he lived, may gain a similar hold upon the hearts of men, and thus mould and shape them in an excellent way.

God grant that we may thus learn good lessons from his life. God grant that this nation may be chastened and blessed in its dark hour, and on the morrow, when that poor, maimed, and emaciated body is laid to its last rest by those who have loved him so well, and all over this land the people gather in solemn sadness in their churches, hung with funeral drapings, to listen to the sad words that must be uttered, may God grant that an electric thrill may leap from heart to heart, from city to city, from east to west ; a deep and strong resolve to honor the blessed memory of the idolized dead by making this nation great enough, good enough, God-fearing enough to be worthy of the precious blood.

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